



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### **About...Anthrax**

##### **What is anthrax?**

Anthrax is a disease that mostly occurs in herbivores; such as goats, sheep, and cattle. Other animals, such as humans, can become infected. It is caused by a spore-forming bacteria.

The disease has occurred worldwide but is most common in Africa and Asia. Outbreaks have rarely occurred in the United States. The spores will survive for decades in the soil.

##### **How is anthrax spread?**

There are three ways humans can get anthrax

- Skin: touching an infected animal or animal parts and spores enter through cuts or breaks in the skin;
- Lungs: inhaling anthrax spores; and
- Stomach: eating under cooked meat from an animal with anthrax.

##### **Who is at risk for anthrax?**

- Persons who work directly with the bacteria in the lab.
- Persons who work with imported animal hides or furs.
- Persons who handle infected animals and contaminated animal products in high-risk areas.
- Military personnel deployed to areas with high risk for exposure.

##### **How do I know if I have anthrax?**

Symptoms depend on how a person was exposed to anthrax:

- Skin: an itchy lesion that becomes a painless sore that appears black in the center. Lymph nodes in the area of the rash may swell. This type of exposure is very treatable, but if not treated, 20% of people with skin anthrax die.
- Lungs: cold-like symptoms appear 1 to 6 days after being exposed (most often within 48 hours), but then more severe breathing problems develop. Shock follows, and death can occur in one to two days after cold-like symptoms begin. 75% of people with lung anthrax die.
- Stomach: symptoms include nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever. More severe symptoms follow, which include stomach pain, vomiting of blood, and diarrhea. If not treated, death occurs in 25% to 60% of people with stomach anthrax.

### **How is anthrax treated?**

Anthrax can be treated with certain antibiotics, but treatment must begin very soon after exposure. Lung anthrax should be treated prior to symptom onset.

Persons with exposure need to be seen by public health officials to decide if antibiotic treatment should be started.

### **How is anthrax prevented?**

Vaccination is used only for those at high risk;

- healthy people aged 18 to 65 years, who have been exposed to anthrax;
- persons who work with animal hides or furs that were imported from high risk countries;
- veterinarians who handle animals or animal products in areas where anthrax is common; and
- United States military.

The antibiotics used after exposure are very effective in preventing anthrax disease.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[United States Department of Defense](#)

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